

Greg Lake lets fans put him 'In the Hot Seat'

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BY JESSICA A. BOTELHO

With both a new solo album and autobiography in the works, Greg Lake, formerly of Emerson, Lake and Palmer, as well as King Crimson, is about to embark on a solo tour, called "Songs of a Lifetime," and he will be bringing his one-man-show to the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center in New Bedford on April 17.

The 65-year-old rocker, who sings and plays guitar and bass, said he came up with the tour concept while writing his book, "Lucky Man," which chronicles his life from infancy, thorough his childhood and teenage years, his days with ELP, King Crimson and up to today.

"As I was writing, different songs would pop up as to being pivotal in my life and the idea just occurred to me of making a show of them," Lake said. "For the last 40 years, I've shared this journey with the audience that has come to see ELP and King Crimson so I'll be telling stories about how the songs came about. It's an imitate show."

Lake wants to engage the audience by allowing them to ask questions between songs. In fact, when he last toured with Keith Emerson, they let fans take part in a question and answer session during a performance.

"It was one of those things I wanted to do again," said Lake. "I've performed rock and roll all over the world and although music communicates with people, it doesn't give you the chance to actually exchange words with anyone in the audience. There's a sense of excitement because you never know what we're going to come up with it."

During a New York show that Lake played with Emerson, a woman told them her brother was trained in classical piano. She explained that she used to lie underneath the piano when he was playing and pretend he was Emerson.

"The audience laughed at that point and I said, 'Would you like to come up?' She said, 'yeah,' and I asked Keith to play something while she was underneath the piano. The audience went wild. It was fun to see and I think they enjoyed seeing her get her wish come true."

With a vast catalog of material not only from ELP and King Crimson, Lake, is set to perform music from his solo albums. He said fans should expect to hear his biggest hits.

"There are things that people want me to play and if I didn't there would be trouble," Lake said. "On the other hand, you think, 'how do I pick songs that are not overly obvious?' The answer is sometimes songs become timely and sometimes it's timely to leave songs out. But, the show will be a mixture of things and there will be some surprises in there."

Because he's friendly with musicians throughout the country, Lake plans on inviting special guests in various cities to join him onstage. This, he said, keeps the crowd on their toes.

"Often someone will come in and play a song with me," he said. "What it won't be is a folk singer sitting on a stool with a guitar talking about being a legend. To be frank, it's a challenge to do a one-man show. But, in reality, there will be a lot of stuff happening. I want it to have the feeling of a celebration."

Lake said he feels listening to music as a group adds a "magical" element to live performances. In fact, he thinks music is best enjoyed with friends.

"Before the Walkman, music was a shared experience," he said. "We would buy an album, sit down with our friends, listen to it together and look at the album together. But, when the Walkman came out, it became a solitary experience with your headphones. Now, it's the iPod or the iPhone. Well, I believe it's a shared thing and that's what I like about this tour."

In addition to sharing his music and stories, Lake also makes inquiries of other musicians. Former member of The Beatles, drummer Ringo Starr, is one of them.

In 2001, when he toured with Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band, Lake asked him about his days with the Beatles.

"We used to fly with him on his private jet and he would just start telling stories because he's got so many of them," said Lake. "Right up until the last show they played at Candlestick Park they never had their own hotel rooms. They always used to go two to a room. It's fascinating to look back."

Speaking of The Beatles, Lake said that while many progressive rock fans cite, "In the Court of the Crimson King," as one of the greatest prog rock records of all time and some even call it the first progressive rock album of all time, he disagrees.

"It was, in a way, original, but I don't think it was the first progressive album ever made-Sgt. Pepper was before that and that was actually a progressive record. When we formed KC, there was a need to be original in the music business. When you'd hear a record then and you'd hear the first few seconds and know who you were listening to. All the acts had their own identity."

At the time, Lake said, most English rock acts were drawing their inspiration from American music, such as blues, gospel, soul, rock and roll and country. King Crimson tried a different approach.

"We decided to draw our influences from European music," said Lake. "We studied the greats that went before us and then made our own version from that cloth. That's really how people learn. If you can emulate the greats you have a template to print over your own personality and individuality."

But, that unique style is keeping bands such as King Crimson, ELP, Rush, and Yes, to name a few, to be excluded from the United States Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, as the organization has shunned progressive rock acts. Lake thinks the Hall of Fame is making a mistake.

"They're denying that progressive music exists in the history of rock and roll and that's a very stupid thing to do," he said. "You may not like it, but don't deny it exists. Both the bands I've been involved in have been an

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influence upon American rock music. It's undeniable. I'm not saying we're as important of The Beatles but we were influential. I don't lose sleep over it but it seems strange to me."

For now, Lake is spending his time working on his solo album and autobiography. While he doesn't like giving out release dates, he hopes to have them out next year at the latest.

"I started the album five years ago and it's more than half recorded," he said. "I never found the right time to release it and I think that time is coming close. The book is the story of my life and I'm not quite finished with it. It's something I've been writing for a long time."

Aside from making music, he's busy collecting first-edition books in his spare time. So far, he has acquired nearly 100.

"The history fascinates me," Lake said. "To me, they have a special meaning. I have the first edition of *Mutiny on the Bounty* written in 1745 signed by [Lieutenant William Bligh.] I have several books from the private library of Marie Antoinette and Nina France, as well as the first edition of *Treasure Island*."

For more information about Lake, check out his website at greglake.com.

"I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the show," said Lake.

The Zeiterion Performing Arts Center's box office is located at 684 Purchase Street, New Bedford, MA. Box Office Hours: M-F 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sat 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and one hour before each performance. Parking is free in an adjacent garage. For more information, visit www.zeiterion.org.



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